

NEWS FROM ED MARKEY

United States Congress

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MARKEY INTRODUCES BILL TO PREVENT OUTSOURCING OF TORTURE

Bill would block extra-judicial transfers to human rights abuser nations

WASHINGTON, DC - Representative Edward Markey (D-MA), a senior member of the Committee on Homeland Security, today introduced legislation to outlaw the current U.S. government practice of sending terrorism suspects to foreign governments known to engage in torture. The bill has been endorsed by Human Rights Watch and Human Rights First.

“Extraordinary rendition is outsourcing torture, and it is morally repugnant to allow such a practice to continue,” said Rep. Markey. Rep. Markey added, “The legislation I am introducing today is designed to ensure that we not only ban torture conducted by our own forces, but we also stop the practice of contracting out torture to other nations. Torture enabled by extraordinary rendition is outrageous and must be stopped.”

The practice of extraordinary rendition, the extra-judicial removal of people in U.S. custody both domestically and abroad to foreign governments that are known to use torture, has received little attention because of the degree of secrecy with which it occurs. Attention was first drawn to the practice in September 2002 when Maher Arar, a Canadian citizen, was seized while in transit to Canada through JFK airport, and sent to Jordan and later Syria at the request of the CIA. While in Syria, Arar was tortured and held in a dark, 3-by-6-foot cell for nearly a year. He was ultimately released and detailed his story to the media upon his return to Canada. Since that time, other press reports have identified renditions elsewhere around the world, such as the transfer of an Australian citizen, Mamdouh Habib, from Pakistan to Egypt, where he was reportedly tortured.

Although the total numbers of those “rendered” by the Bush Administration are unknown, then-CIA director George Tenet testified to the 9/11 Commission in October 2002 that over 70 people had been subjected to renditions prior September 11. Human rights organizations including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Center for Constitutional Rights and the ACLU have detailed numerous other cases and are pursuing litigation in some of them. Last year, the Canadian government launched an investigation into Arar’s case, but the U.S. State Department has refused to cooperate with the Canadian investigation.

The Markey bill directs the State Department to compile a list of countries that commonly practice torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment during detention and interrogation, and prohibit rendition to any nation on this list. The bill explicitly permits legal, treaty-based extradition, in which suspects have the right to appeal in a U.S. court to block the proposed transfer based on the likelihood that they would be subjected to torture or other inhumane treatment.

Rep. Markey concluded, “Extraordinary rendition violates the Convention Against Torture, which the U.S. has signed and ratified. Sending suspects to nations where they are likely to be tortured puts our own soldiers at risk of being subjected to the same brutal treatment. The practice of outsourcing torture must be stopped. The bill I’m introducing today would do that.”

Additional information is available at Rep. Markey’s website, <http://www.house.gov/markey>.

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